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## 'Gangstas' and Preachers: A Deeper Look into the Code of the Street and Hip-Hop and Rap Music

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# “GANGSTAS” AND PREACHERS

## A Deeper Look into the Code of the Street and Hip-Hop and Rap Music

Alise Greco | Criminal Justice and Criminology

### INTRODUCTION

#### Elijah Anderson's “Code of the Street”

The oppositional subculture characterized by toxic masculinity, a street form of justice, violence, and mistrust in conventional institutions. This way of life and collection of norms flows from structural racism, economic disadvantage in African American communities.

How can we use the Code of the Street (COTS) to characterize and better understand the arguably deviant & violent culture that is portrayed in hip-hop and rap?

#### Goal and Purpose:

To understand the messages and language portrayed in hip-hop and rap songs, how they express the COTS, and why such music might instead be a reflection of or cry for help from the lifestyle that the Code fosters.

The two-era comparison widens our perspectives to include and consider multiple time-specific systemic issues, opinions, and norms.

### METHOD & CODING SCHEME

#### 80s & 90s Era

- *Black Steel in the Hour of Chaos*
- *Changes*-Tupac
- *Straight Outta Compton*-N.W.A.
- *Nuthin' But A “G” Thang*
- *Hard Knock Life*
- *Check Yo Self*-Ice Cube
- *N.Y. State of Mind*-Nas
- *Wu Tang Clan Ain't Nuthing ta F'Wit*-Wu Tang Clan
- *Cop Killer*-Ice-T
- *Straight Out the Jungle*-Jungle Brothers

#### 2010s Era

- *This is America*-Childish Gambino
- *FDT*-YG
- *Snow on Tha Bluff*-J. Cole
- *The Storm*-Eminem
- *Alright*-Kendrick Lamar
- *The Bigger Picture*-Lil Baby
- *Land of the Free*-Joey Bada\$\$
- *Babushka Boi*-A\$AP Rocky
- *The Box*-Roddy Rich
- *New Slaves*-Kanye West
- *DNA*-Kendrick Lamar

COTS was expected to manifest itself within the songs through phrases, slang, and other words that signified or outwardly referenced:

- objectification or harassment of women
- Glorification of violence and exuding macho masculinity
- Threats
- Drug use
- Mistrust or hate towards the police and the CJ system

Are these aspects of COTS being portrayed as something desirable? Corrupt? A lesson to be given? Something of reality but that *needs to be changed*?

### RESULTS

#### PASSIVE PREACHER

**Straight Out the Jungle** | “struggle to live struggle to survive, struggle just to stay alive”

★

**Changes** | “that’s just the way it is”

★

**Hard Knock Life** | “nightmares of a lonely cell”

★

**Changes** | “I see no changes... is life worth living should I blast myself? I’m tired of bein’ poor and even worse I’m black”



#### ACTIVE PREACHER

**Snow on tha Bluff** | “Let’s get real... a perspective and awareness of the system and unfairness that afflicts them”

★

**The Bigger Picture** | “I even done told them please... I ain’t do this for the trend”

★

**This is America** | “Don’t catch you slippin’ now”

★

**Land of the Free** | “the first step in the change is to take notice”



#### BLIND GANGSTA

**The Box** | “I was out back, where the stash at, cruise the city in a bulletproof Cadillac”

★

**Cop Killer** | “F\* the police for Daryl Gates. F\* the police for Rodney King”

★

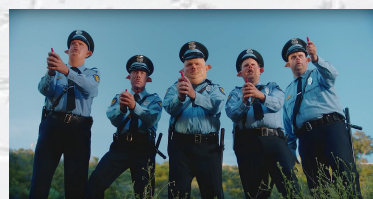
**Alright** | “I’m a motherf\*cking ganster... alls my life I has to fight”

★

**Babushka Boi** | “Bang squeeze the trigger, kill please”

★

**Wu Tang Clan Ain't Nuthin ta F'Wit** | “I be tossing and flossing my style is awesome”



#### PROUD PROMOTING GANGSTA

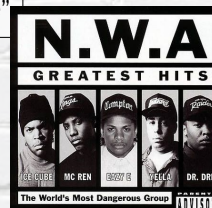
**Straight Outta Compton** | “You are now about to witness the strength of street knowledge!”

★

**Wu Tang Clan Ain't Nuthin' ta F'Wit** | “I come to get a slice of the punk and the pie, rather do than die, check my flavor”

★

**Wu Tang Clan Ain't Nuthin' ta F'Wit** | “If you want beef then bring the ruckus”



### CONCLUSIONS & POLICY IMPLICATIONS

#### Analysis

| 2010-2020 Era |

- more intellectual and direct with the issues discussed
- Now COTS is increasingly being looked at as a problem that contributes to a more broader, systemic issue from the government
- Less acceptance
- Notions and stereotypes need to be corrected!

| 80s-90s Era |

- Accepting COTS lifestyle as a local struggle and inevitable fate
- Less hope for change
- Portraying violence and physical aggression is given greater value
- Toxic masculinity
- Less meaningful in the political sense

#### What does this mean, then?

We should not be so quick to ostracize this type of music because it carries the weight of not just being relatable, but also being a symbol for an oppositional culture that develops as a result of our close-mindedness and ignorance.

Engaging in intersectional reflexivity allows to grasp the possibility that even by coming from a conventional background, we can so easily misinterpret messages!

#### LITERATURE CITED

Anderson, Elijah. (1999). *The Code of the Street: Decency, Violence, and the Moral Life of the Inner City*. W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.

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